



Human
Rights
Concern
Eritrea

eritrea.facts@gmail.com

www.hrc-eritrea.org

31 January 2017

Report on the State of Human Rights in Eritrea 2016

Introduction:

Eritrea is a one-party state and it has been ruled by a transitional government since 1991. Ironically enough the name of the ruling party is: People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ) and it has been mis(led) by President Isaias Afewerki since the specified period. Considering that Mr. Afewerki was the head of the then Eritrean People Liberation Front (EPLF) for twenty years one can safely say that he is one of the long serving dictators Africa has to grapple with.

The Eritrean constitution that was drafted and ratified by the National Assembly in May 1997 was put on hold; the national election scheduled for December 2001 was indefinitely postponed; and The National Assembly was, in effect, nullified.

At a time when the world is respecting even animal rights, Eritrea is still lagging in the human rights front. All sorts of freedoms – of press, worship, association, etc. have been brutally suspended. There is no single private or independent media outlet in Eritrea. The private newspapers have been closed from 2001 and its journalists have been languishing in jail ever since, and some are presumed to be dead. The state-owned media is the mouthpiece of the government, and it controls every public outlet of information. There is no right to gather in Eritrea, no rights to protest peacefully; and no form of free speech whatsoever. There is no religious liberty, and the Eritrean government ranks internationally amongst the worst violators of religious freedom.

Furthermore, National Human rights groups cannot operate and international human rights organizations are banned from entering the country. There is no tolerance for NGOs. There are no political parties, no unions, no protection of workers' rights, nor an independent judiciary system. Tens of thousands of men, women and children have been imprisoned without trial and are languishing there in terrible conditions. They are subjected to brutality on a regular basis, including electric shocks, genital torture, rape and sexual slavery, sleep deprivation, starvation, exposure to extremes of hot and cold temperatures, and no medical care.

Thousands risk their lives to leave the country illegally every month, despite the shoot-to-kill policy reported to be in force on the border. This is fueling a demand for people smugglers. Unable to leave by normal means, many Eritreans decide to risk kidnap, extortion, rape and death at the hands of the smugglers in order to reach a safer country. Some end up having their organs removed and sold against their will.

1. Report of the United Nations Commission of Inquiry (UN-COI) on the situation of Human Rights in Eritrea:

On Friday 01 July 2016, the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) accepted the findings of the Commission of Inquiry (COI) into Human Rights in Eritrea, including the conclusion that Crimes Against Humanity have been committed by the government and officials of Eritrea.

Despite very active lobbying from Eritrean government representatives against the findings, the truth of the Inquiry's conclusions prevailed, and the Council accepted a Resolution which recommended the extension of the mandate of UN Special Rapporteur on Eritrea and the provision of resources to make this possible.

The startling conclusions of the COI and the identification of "Crimes Against Humanity" as having been committed in Eritrea was clearly and hugely disturbing to the Eritrean regime, which spared no effort in trying to have the Commission's revealing Report rejected. Despite these efforts, the truth about the Eritrean abuses of human rights prevailed, and the COI Report as well as its detailed analysis was both welcomed and accepted by the global community.

The Resolution passed was very detailed with very specific target and it has fiercely demanded an end to:

- Indefinite Conscription of those reaching the age of 18 and the use of Conscripts for Forced Labour.
- Arbitrary arrest and detention, enforced disappearance, torture, and the shoot-to-kill policy at borders.
- Persecution on Religious and Ethnic grounds.

The Resolution also specifically demanded:

- Release of political prisoners
- Full freedom of expression, association and movement for all citizens.
- The Eritrean government to co-operate with all UN bodies and mechanisms.

The Resolution called on Eritrea to:

- Implement all the Recommendations from the UN Second Universal Periodic Review.
- Co-operate fully with the UN Special Rapporteur for Eritrea.
- Give unhindered access to UN missions and representatives of the UN Human Rights Council.

Of crucial importance was the recommendation to extend the mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur for Eritrea, in order for her to continue documenting the damning human rights situation and to follow up the Recommendations of the COI. The Resolution asked the Secretary General of the UN to provide the Special Rapporteur with adequate financial and logistical support.

2. Indefinite Military Service and Forced Labour

The authoritarian Eritrean regime is notorious for confining the youth of the country in a forced and indefinite national service and shattering their dreams in the process. All Eritreans between the age of 18 – 50, regardless of their gender, are forced to complete their national service. The national service was supposed to be 18 months but the government is using all sorts of excuses to make it indefinite, one of the excuses being the “unclearable” ‘cloud of war’ between Eritrea and Ethiopia. In time of distress, the government calls even those who are in the age range of 50 – 80 for a strenuous military training.

At the end of active military service, citizens are supposed to have the right to return to their education, previous employment or do what they desire as citizens, but many are forced to work into government owned construction companies, industries, mining projects, farms, hospitals, security and civil services.... subjected to endless abuses and what might be termed “slave labourers” with no rights or freedom to leave this forced employment with \$10 dollar per month for working six and a half days’ per week.

When Eritrea was discussing a large grant from the European Union in 2015, senior Eritrean officials told diplomats that the 18-month limit on National Service would be applied to all new conscripts, although not to those already serving far longer. However, it is clear that the Eritrean government has abandoned that proposal. The Information Minister of Eritrea has confirmed that indefinite National Service is going to remain without fundamental change.

In effect, Eritrea is not prepared to stop forcing its youth into lengthy stretches of work as soldiers and compulsory labourers, a conscription policy that is driving waves of refugees to leave the country to escape from a compulsory and indefinite National Service.

3. Salary Increases for Conscripts in Military

The government of Eritrea claims to have implemented salary increases for National service conscripts in the military; but this is hardly the full truth. The announced salary increase to a monthly total of 1800 Nakfa is baseless. The government claim that the salary of the soldiers or national service members was increased to 1,800 Nakfa as from July 2015 omits crucial details of compulsory official deductions from military salaries; these include 300 Nakfa for “logistics”, 180 Nakfa for “building a house”, 250 Nakfa for tax, 100 Nakfa for military food provisions, and 600 Nakfa to be invested in an official bank account. It is clear that, after compulsory deductions, the soldiers receive not no more than 20% of their official salary. The message the Eritrean authorities would like to convey is that people are willingly serving in the military with a guaranteed 1800 Nakfa basic salary.

4. Banking and Currency Issues

In December 2015 government began printing new Nakfa notes (local currency), Eritrean citizens have been obliged to put all their money into bank accounts. Once their money is in the bank, citizens are allowed only to withdraw 5000 Nakfa per month from their account. It is common to see people queuing at the bank from early in the morning (before dawn) and spend the whole day on the queue to withdraw their monthly quota of 5000 Nakfa and that is only if they are lucky because scores of them will be told to come on the next day due to the number of people who are wasting their precious time to withdraw their hard-won currency.

The People's personal savings have been trapped within the banking system from the introduction of the newly printed currency. Those in business are worst affected by these restrictions on withdrawal of currency. In addition, the bank deducts around 2 to 4% from customers' funds on an annual basis for purposes of administration.

Bank customers are technically allowed to make money transfers by Cheque. But nobody wishes to receive a cheque for any goods sold, because, upon producing the cheque at the bank, there is no possibility of withdrawing the money in cash. Businesses and individuals who have managed to withdraw or transfer significant funds from their bank accounts in December 2016 have now been officially warned to return all the withdrawn funds to the original bank accounts or face investigation and punishment by the government.

All of these Draconian restrictions have had a major effect. There is a major crisis of liquidity in the Eritrean economy brought about by these extreme restrictions on cash withdrawals.

A public notice sent on 9 December 2016 states that individuals who withdrew money amounting to more than 200,000 (two hundred thousand) Nakfa from their bank accounts, as well as businesses that withdrew more than 400,000 (four hundred thousand) Nakfa in the period of one year since the change of currency must return the money to the bank by the end of the month. Should the individuals and businesses fail to do so within the specified period of time, the notice warns that their matter will be forwarded to relevant government body for consideration. According to the decree which makes allowance to the amount of money an individual or a business can withdraw from the bank, it is impossible for one to reach a limit to the amount stated in this notice. Nonetheless, many people have managed to withdraw more money through cheques (which is legally allowed) and other money transferring schemes. These people will now be affected by this notice. The full version of the notice reads as follows:

Important Notice
To customers of all banks
9 December, 2016

You deposited cash money to the bank during the period of change of currency; and the Bank of Eritrea had subsequently issued a directive that limits to the amount of money that one can withdraw from his/her bank account. Those of you who withdrew more than such a limit (that is, individuals who withdrew more than 200 thousand Nakfa and businesses that withdrew more than 400 thousand Nakfa) are hereby informed to return the money back to their accounts by 31/12/2016. Should you fail to do so within the specified date, you will be held accountable and that your matter will be forwarded to the relevant government body for consideration.

Victory to the Masses!!
Commercial Bank of Eritrea



Economic Mismanagement and Hardships of the Eritrean People

A. Transportation Crises in Eritrea

The transportation and communication sector is one of the public services that is clearly and directly affected by the maladministration of the authoritarian regime in Asmara.

The majority of the Eritrean people use land transport services hence the importance of sufficient public bus services is indisputable. There were public transport buses owned by different individuals and associations but they are now out of business, owing to government action. The authorities deliberately denied bus companies access to fuel and banned the import of spare parts. The regime also conscripted bus drivers into the military service. It also forced the owners to pay huge tariffs and taxes. The implementation of these anti- business policies, deliberately intended to undermine the private sector, has resulted in the transport services being engulfed in a huge crisis.

Once the privately-owned bus companies were put out of business, the bus transportation service was replaced by buses administered through government's own economic institution, the PFDJ. These new buses were imported duty free. They are administered by Harat Company – an economic arm of the PFDJ. The problem with these buses is that they remain unable to meet the demands of public transportation. Principally, there are far too few buses in total number and like any other sector of the economy administered by the government or PFDJ, the service is embroiled in a high level of maladministration and corruption. As a result, commuters are forced to stand waiting for a bus day and night at every bus station. Some people report that, just to get a bus from Asmara to Tesseney, they wait at the bus station for three days and night to no avail.

B. Drinking Water Crises in Asmara

Asmara is the capital city of the state of Eritrea. It is situated in the highlands of Eastern Africa at an altitude of 2230 metres above sea level. But the water infrastructure of Asmara is a living testimony to how the city's infrastructure has been increasingly degraded.

The Italian colonizers who founded Asmara also built a dam to serve as its water source on its outskirts in a place known as Mai Nefhi. The geographic position of Asmara itself is helpful to ensure that enough water is available to supply a modern city. Rainfall is relatively high and the terrain is made up of so many valleys that it is quite easy to conserve large amounts of water by constructing a dam. Based on information from the Ministry of Land, Water and Environment, the amount of water available to supply Asmara is enough for 3 times to the number of residents of the city. Nonetheless, the residents of Asmara do not receive enough water.

In the last 15 years, Asmara has continued to face acute water shortages and since 2015, the problem has become much worse. During the rainy season, there is relatively little shortage of water because people make use of every container they have to collect rain water. But during the dry season, there are severe shortages. It is quite normal to see a long line of water storage containers and buckets waiting to be filled from a water truck. It has been one and half years since some parts of Asmara last saw water flowing from a tap. While many places in the city do have access to water supplied by water trucks once a week, there are still places that do not enjoy this 'privilege'.

This crisis is man-made. Asmara has sufficient water resources for all its citizens. However, the infrastructure has not been properly maintained, and little is being done to repair and replace it. Some citizens believe that this is a deliberate policy of control employed by the Eritrean government to exert full control over the public by a policy of limited provision of basic goods and services such as water.



C. Internally Displaced Persons and Begging in Eritrea

In the city of Asmara there are many beggars these days. Most of them are mothers accompanied by their children. Their dress, their language and dialect appear to indicate that they are displaced

from remote areas such as the southern region (Zoba Debub), Anseba, and Gash-Barka. Most of the beggars are not willing to explain why they are begging because they fear that the person who is asking might be a regime informant.

The beggars have real fears for their own security. They are on the run at all times to escape being rounded up. In Eritrea, there is no right to beg and sleep on the streets. The authorities routinely round-up beggars, most of whom are mothers with their children. A special unit of the police force (locally known as Municipal) and sometimes the so-called civilian police are employed to hunt these beggars. They are then kept in a kind of concentration camp known as “Enda Se’Al”.

The one thing that these beggars do say is that they are displaced “from a very far place” because of severe drought. There are also thousands of internally displaced people who have found refuge in homes of family members who live in Asmara, owing to severe drought. The dire overcrowding situation in Asmara itself is basically caused by the drought which took place in rural areas.

D. Drought, Food Shortages and Malnutrition

Experts describe Eritrea as an “arid” country. Being in the Sahel region of Africa, Eritrea is vulnerable to drought and is affected by periods of poor or no rainfall, especially so in this period of climate change, with dry spells linked by some scientists to the “El Nino” weather patterns affecting the Pacific and Indian oceans.

Agriculture employs over 66% of the population and up to 80% of the population relies on subsistence agriculture for its food supply. Even in years of good rainfall, it is thought that about 30% of the population’s nutrition needs are not met, so in dry spells the proportion vulnerable to malnutrition and starvation is much higher.

Food insecurity has now reached critical levels with reports indicating imminent famine. UN estimates indicate that about 2 million people are without adequate food supplies. Women and children are most badly affected by malnutrition, especially children under 5 years of age. In the four driest regions of Eritrea, over 20,000 children under the age of 5 are currently likely to suffer acute malnutrition. Up to half of the children in rural Eritrea suffer from stunted growth and are unlikely to achieve their full capacity in physical or mental development because of inadequate nutrition.

A country so vulnerable to drought and starvation needs all the external help it can receive; but a nation closed to most international agencies with irresponsible government unwilling to open up its borders to outside help cannot expect to make much impact in solving such huge and intractable problems as Eritrea faces periodic and prolonged drought and its people are starving and dying in silence.

5. Economic Sanctions and Pressure on the people of Eritrea

1. Shortages

One explanation for the endemic shortages in Eritrea is that the governing regime believes that if it has full control over the entire economy it will have full control over all the people. Many believe that it is deliberate policy of the government of Eritrea that the public should be condemned to economic shortages; because there is a misconception stating that people become so preoccupied in dealing with daily economic difficulties that there is simply no time or energy

left to struggle for human rights and freedoms. Thus, economic shortages help to sustain such a dictatorship. The Eritrean governing regime has been employing such oppressive economic strategies ever since the independence of the nation.

2. Rationing

One of the economic sanctions placed upon the society by the current Eritrean regime is what is commonly called 'Coupon' – the introduction of a system of rationing. The rationing system was first introduced in 2001, and through this system the government had managed to control every aspect of the Eritrean society by 2009, particularly in the cities. The Food Commodities Distribution Program, using a coupon-system, controls every gram of food consumed by every member of each household, and information is fed into a database ensuring even more state control and manipulation. The program calls itself 'Fair Price'; in reality the prices are unreasonable. The rationing system has created a number of economic, political and social benefits to the regime, some of which are presented here below.

I. Economic benefits:

The governing regime has managed to control all trade activities by channeling it through Red Sea Corporation. This company is owned by the PFDJ government office of economic affairs and serves as one of the economic arms of the regime. The company is the sole importer of basic goods to the country. It imports; among other things, food oil, sorghum, wheat, gasoline and natural gas. It sales the imported goods to the public through distribution outlets found around the country, locally known as 'Dukan Hdri', and owned by the ruling party. In this way, the regime manages to exert absolute economic control over imports, distribution and sales of basic goods in the country.

The regime also sells the goods it confiscates from business people and ordinary citizens through 'dukan Hdri' outlets. It normally confiscates goods intercepted on the way between Asmara and Tesseney. Business people and ordinary people import goods such as traditional spices, soaps, sardine, biscuits and the likes via Sudan and Tesseney. The regime considers this trade route as contraband and accordingly the goods are liable to be confiscated.

There are also times when goods that failed to attract consumers at the market made to be forcibly sold at dukan Hdri outlets. For example, there were products from a Banana and Tomato Factory owned by the regime that failed to attract the market. Consumers were not interested to buy the products. They were then brought to Hidri outlets and people were forced to buy them, in such a way that if people want any other goods from Hidri, they should also buy those products on the side. Those who refused to buy the products on the side were also being refused to buy other vital goods.

II. Political benefits

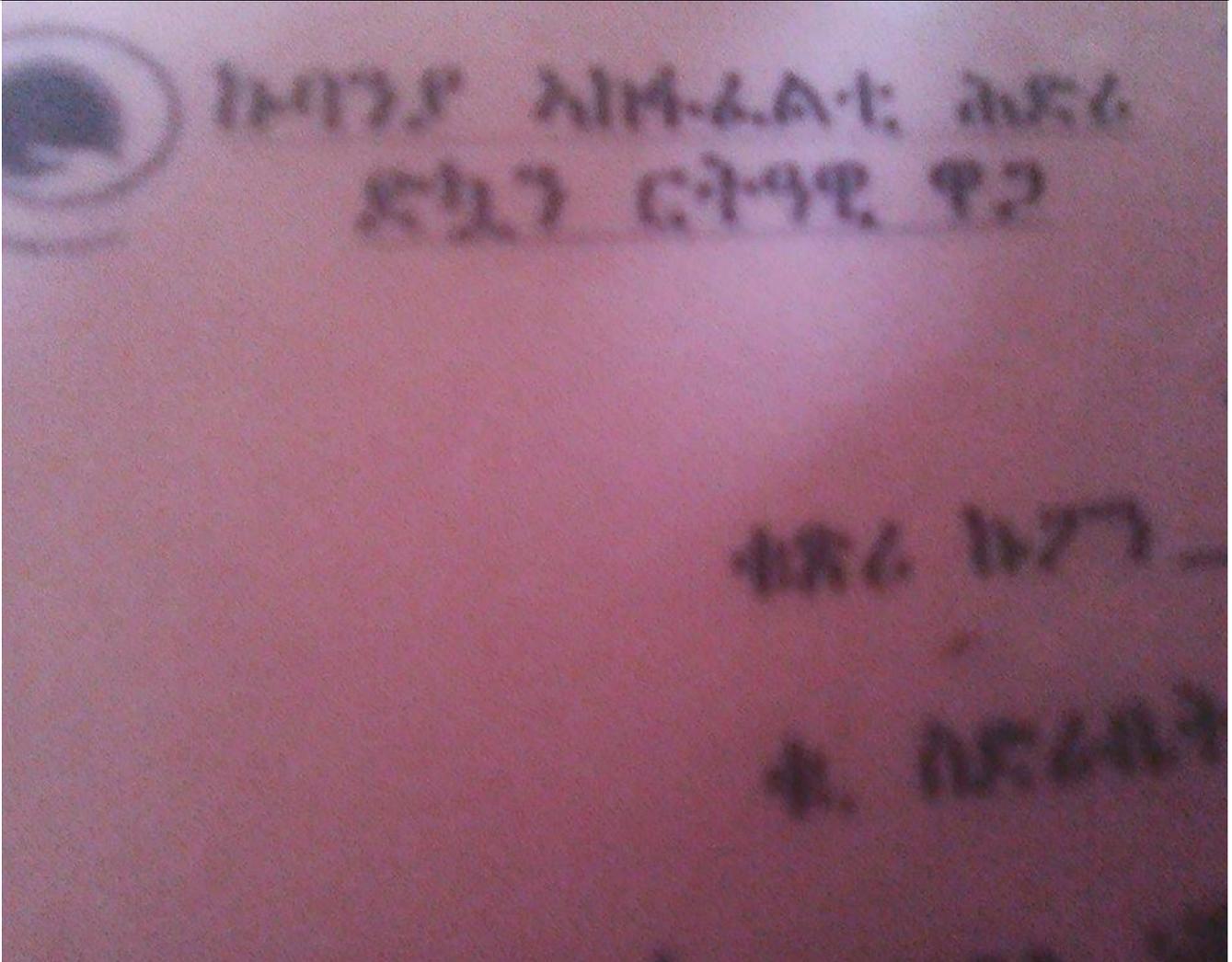
The rationing system is used to secure political control over the public. For instance, when political meetings by government cadres, administrators or PFDJ officials are called, the coupon or the rations system cards of all residents are collected first. Those who fail to hand over their coupon cards and those who fail to attend the political meetings automatically become disqualified from accessing the goods the card has to offer.

III. Control of Youth

The coupon card is used to ensure that young people are conscripted and remain in the national military service. A family whose child fails to report for conscription in the military is liable to lose its coupon card. As from 2004, every student has been obliged to be registered on the family coupon card at the start of his/her 11th grade class. Every student who completes 11th grade is required to join the military at Sawa military training camp. By having the student registered on the family coupon card, the regime ensures that the student will not fail to join the military once he/she completes the 11th grade.

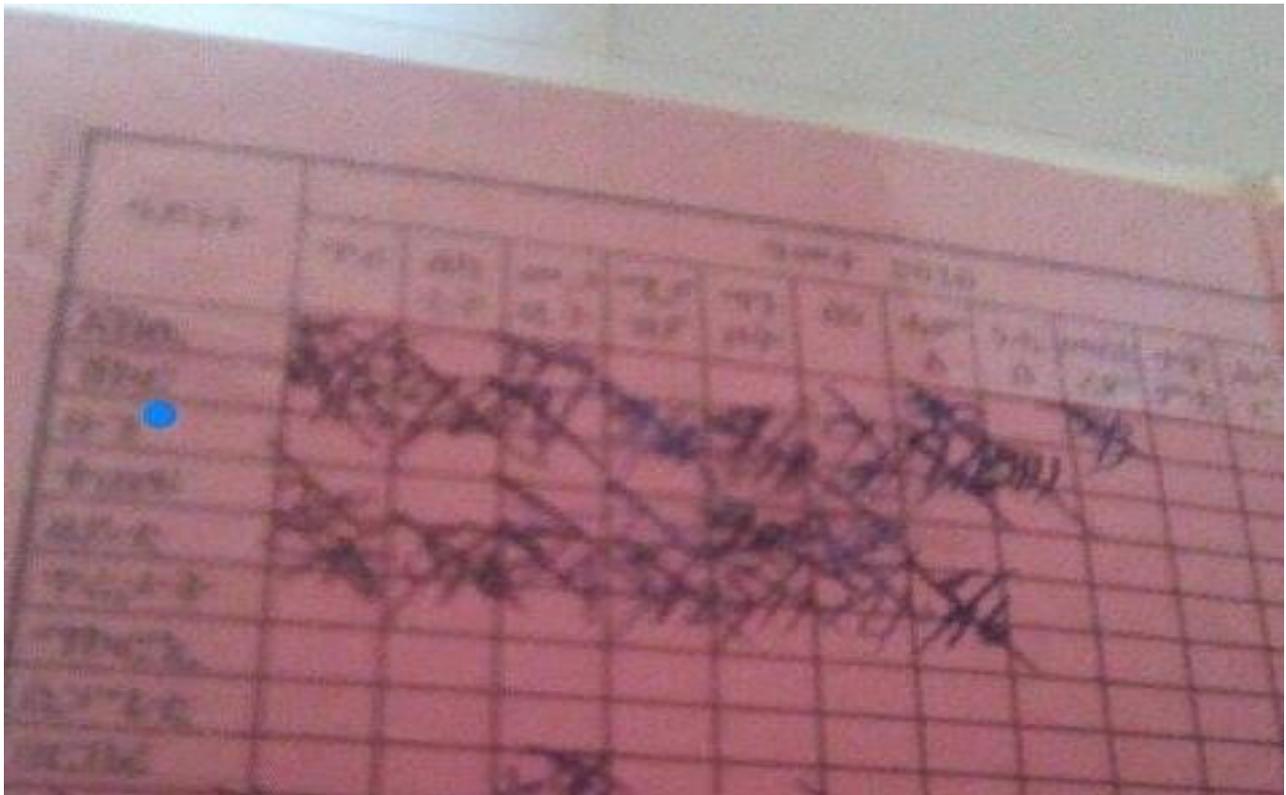
[logo]
HIDRI DISTRIBUTION COMPANY
Fair Price Shop

Coupon Number: _____
Number of Family members: _____



Coupon Card

Type	Year 2016								
	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep
Cereals	XXX		XXX				XXX		XXX
Sugar	XXX	XXX	XXX	XXX	XXX	XXX	XXX	XXX	
Coffee									
Tea	XXX		XXX	XXX	XXX	XXX			
Food Oil	XXX	XXX	XXX	XXX	XXX	XXX	XXX		
Grains									
Macaroni									
Spaghetti									
Chili powder			XXX						



INFORMATION

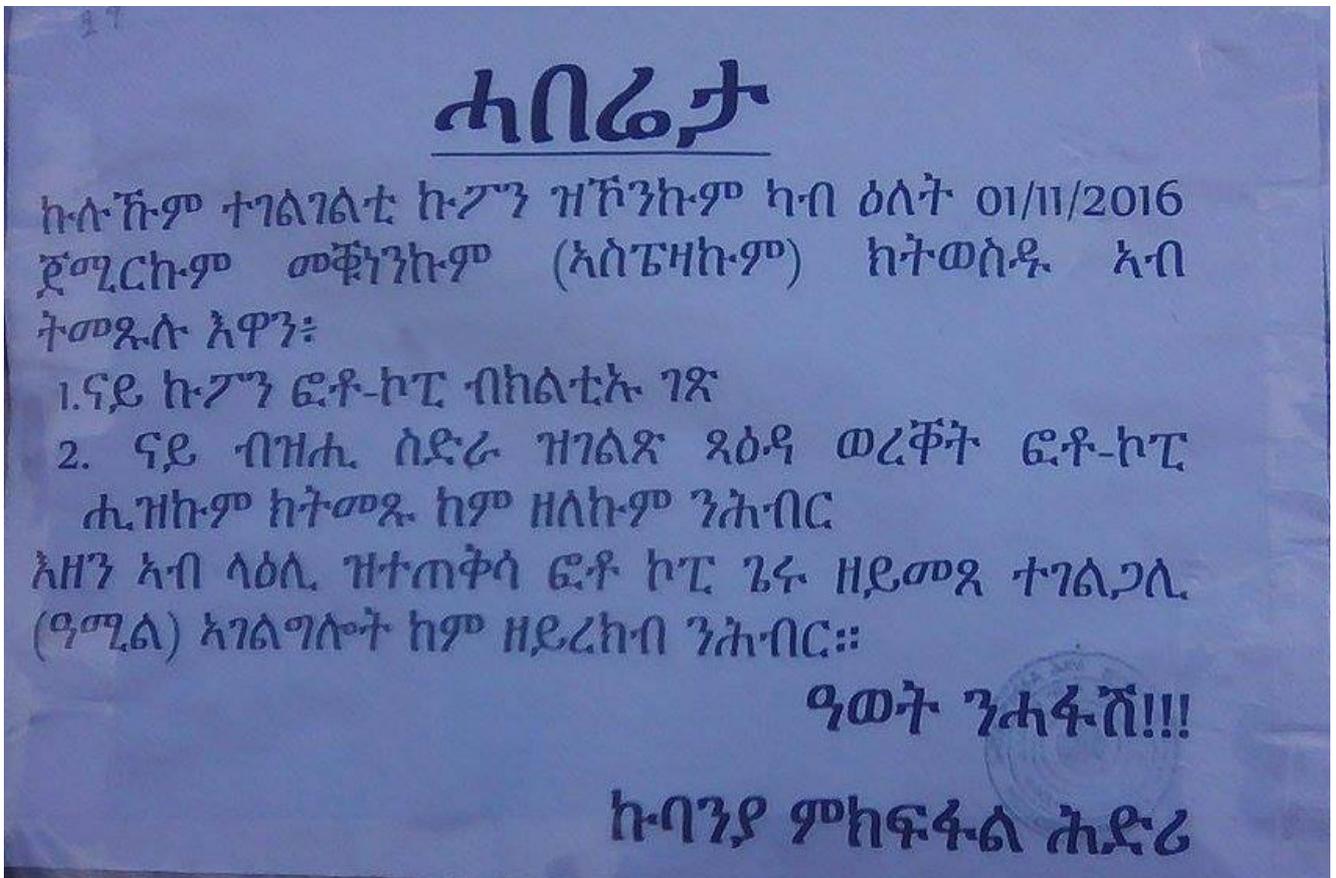
To all clients using the services of Coupon (ration services)

Beginning from 01/11/2016, when you come to dukaun Hdri to collect your goods, make sure that you produce the following documents: -

1. Photocopy of Coupon card, both sides
2. Photocopy of a document that shows the number of individuals in the family

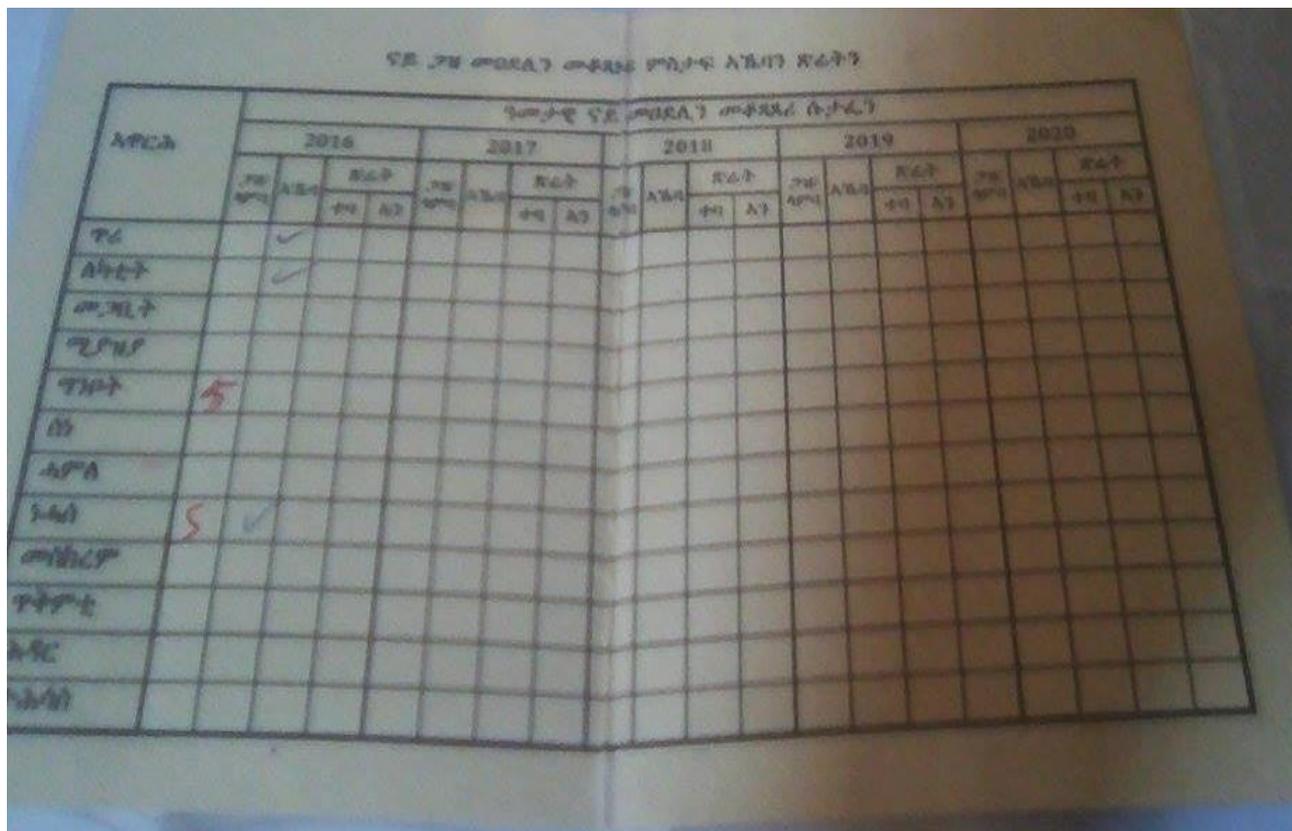
A client who failed to produce copy of these documents will not be provided with any services.

**Victory to the Masses!!!
Hidri Distribution Company**



Supply of Natural Gas and control for one's participation in meetings and cleaning

Month	Yearly Gas supply and control based on participation in meetings and cleaning															
	2016				2017				2018			2019			2020	
	Gas	Meetings	Cleaning		Gas	Meetings	Cleaning									
			M	F			M	F								
Jan		√														
Feb		√														
Mar																
Apr																
May	5															
Jun																
Jul																
Aug	5															
Sep																
Oct																
Nov																
Dec																



6. Refugees

President Isaias Afewerki of Eritrea made a statement on 8 November 2016 about the plight of refugees. He said that migration and the movement of refugees had “become rampant globally”. Particular to be noted was that he stressed “the need for the underlying causes and driving factors to be fully and comprehensively addressed.”

It is most certainly relevant and urgent for the world to identify the causes of the mass exodus of refugees from particular countries. But it is especially ironic that the leader of the regime in Eritrea, which is currently causing the most extraordinary and most numerous exodus of refugees in Africa, should call for the “underlying causes and driving factors” to be addressed – as if anyone outside is responsible for this exodus.

It is essential that the world’s attention be focused on the true cause of their vulnerability –their desperate need to escape from the appalling dangers in their own country, all of which stem from the policies and actions of their own government. As explicitly stated by the UN Commission of Inquiry, the lack of any proper rule of law and effective policing of human rights has made Eritrea a country where there is no political or religious freedom, and victims of the government are routinely imprisoned and tortured, and may disappear or be extra-judicially executed. Without a free media or recourse to legal protections, anyone opposed to government policies is in extreme danger.

But above all other “driving factors” forcing young Eritreans to leave the country and become refugees is the universal National Service, unlimited in extent of time. Those entering such service can remain as quasi slave-labour in the military, agriculture, and mining industries, with no hope of ever escaping.

There is no need to seek for any other “underlying causes” or “driving factors” for the 60,000 refugees who leave their country every year, or the 47,000 Eritreans who sought asylum in Europe in 2015. The dangers facing them in their own country are all too immediate for them to take any other actions, and President Afewerki’s government is directly responsible for this mass exodus.

7. International Attitudes and Interventions

Policies of the European Union and other countries in Europe towards Eritrea

It is clear from the UN Commission of Inquiry Report that the government of Eritrea is making no effort to change its behavior and meet requirements of the UN Human Rights Council and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, yet the European Union (EU) still signed a 200 million Euro economic support grant for Eritrea.

What is the motivation behind what appears to be very surprising contradictions with the policy of the EU and some countries like Norway, Switzerland, Finland and the United Kingdom towards Eritrea? The answer may be found in the large numbers of refugees from Eritrea fleeing to Europe. It seems that the EU hopes that if it invests money in the economy of Eritrea, its young people will no longer be forced to flee. Human Rights Concern-Eritrea (HRCE) believes that this hope is simply

naive and vain, so long as indefinite National Service remains and the egregious human rights situation continue with impunity.

HRCE was deeply concerned by the fact that Germany welcomes officials from the Eritrean Government for confidential negotiations in 2016. Concerns have been expressed that these meetings may well herald policy changes by the Federal government which could greatly endanger refugees from Eritrea.

What is more alarming and disturbing is that the EU programme against people trafficking, laudable in itself, now appears to be used for so-called “border protection”, to support and finance the security services and border forces of countries such as Sudan, and Eritrea, the very forces which commit crimes and serious human rights abuses against refugees such as fleeing Eritreans.

Under possible EU proposals, Sudan would receive equipment such as computers, scanners, cameras, and all the necessary training to police its 17 border crossing points with Eritrea and other countries. Two “reception centres” for illegal migrants would reportedly be established at Gedaref, and Kassala, on Sudan’s eastern border with Ethiopia and Eritrea. The aim is clearly to reduce the numbers of Eritreans who are able to leave their country to find refuge in Europe.

HRCE is deeply concerned that such agreements giving aid to regimes such as Sudan and Eritrea in policing their borders would be tantamount to rewarding the very abusers of human rights from whom Eritrean refugees are fleeing. It contradicts all the human rights principles which the EU proclaim and uphold. HRCE warned most urgently that no confidential security agreements and aid programmes should be made with such regimes until they end the abuses of human rights from which their citizens flee. To do so is in effect to deny refugees from countries such as Eritrea their right to refuge and asylum guaranteed under the Refugee Convention of 1951.